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The Election of 1896: The Fall of the People's Party: An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Resources

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**Annotated Bibliography of Selected Sources
in the Gilded Age, 1877-1900
by
Olivia Lee-Benton**

Primary Sources:

Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention Held in Chicago, Illinois, July 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1896, (Logansport, Indiana, 1896), 226–234. Reprinted in *The Annals of America*, Vol. 12, 1895–1904: Populism, Imperialism, and Reform (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1968), 100–105. Accessed October 10, 2015.

This is a copy of William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold Speech." This is arguably the most famous speech in American politics history and was given on July 9th of 1896 at the Democratic National convention held in Chicago. The speech catapulted Bryan into the Democratic nomination for presidency as he cried, "you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." This speech also gained the support of the Populist Party who chose to align themselves with the Democratic Party by accepting Bryan as their nominee. However, they chose their own vice president. By aligning themselves with the Democrats, the People's Party lost their identity and thus came the fall of the Populist Movement. I will bring this speech into the classroom by giving my students excerpts of this speech and having them discuss the particular rhetoric that struck the interest of the people.

The Omaha Platform (1892). (2008). In R. Adkins (Ed.). *The Evolution of Political Parties, Campaigns, and Elections: Landmark documents, 1787–2007*. (pp. 130-136). Accessed October 10, 2015

This is a copy of the Omaha Platform which was adopted by the founding convention of the Populist Party on July 4, 1892. The preamble was written by Minnesota lawyer, farmer, politician, and novelist Ignatius Donnelly. Most importantly, this document set out the basic tenets of the Populist movement which included the unionization of labor, bimetallism, graduated income tax, establishment of postal savings banks, government ownership of railroads, and no speculation of land only to name a few. This is a significant document as it lays out the foundation of the party and it is important for students to understand that in order for political change to occur, you have not only be informed, but clearly state the change you want to occur. I would use this document in the classroom by giving a copy to the students and reading it together as a class. By doing so, we can break apart the document and truly understand what it is this party hoped to accomplish.

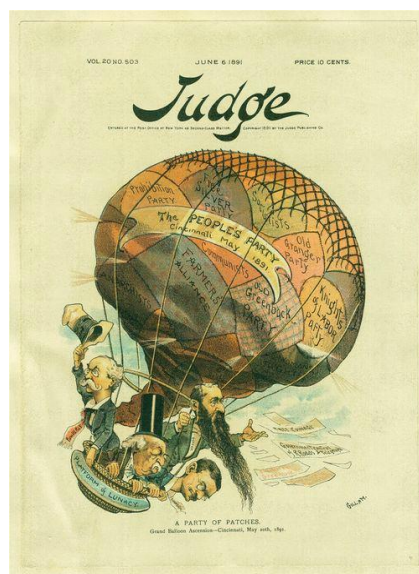
The Salt Lake Herald. (Salt Lake City [Utah], 04 Nov. 1896. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Accessed October 10, 2015.

This is *The Salt Lake Herald* that was published on November 4th 1896. The article in focus is entitled "Republican Landslide" and pertains to the election results. The article goes about breaking the country down state by state and discussing the voter turn out of each state, along with the results of each state at that time. Certain states were even broken down further into major cities. All in all, this document exemplifies the fact that while Bryan "held his own" in places like Nebraska in terms of electoral votes, McKinley was succeeding by landslide. While the actual results of the election put Bryan 176 votes and McKinley at 271, this paper predicted that Bryan was going to receive 137 and McKinley was going to receive 286; some argued he would break 300. This is a significant document because it exemplifies to the students that how long the people had to wait for election results compared to modern day society when its not impossible to figure out election results the same day of the election. This is also significant because it shows that McKinley was going to win which was a major defeat for the Populist movement. I would use this in the classroom by having students break into

Dawsey, M. C. *Marching with McKinley to Victory*. Cleveland, Ohio. 1896. Accessed October 20, 2015.

King, S.S. For Trampling on the Grass. Kansas City, Kansas. 1892. Accessed October 20, 2015.

Gill, M. A Party of Patches. Judge. 1891. Accessed October 16, 2015.



This political cartoon was shown in Judge Magazine on June 6, 1891. The cartoon, being from the point of view of the Republican Party, depicts familiar members of the Populist party riding in a balloon including: Sockless Jerry Simpson, William Pepper, and Mark Twain. The balloon itself is made of patches from different organizations under the Populist Party — or organizations that Republicans claim to be part of the party — and takes a jab at the Populist Party because the balloon is filled with “hot air.” The balloon patches show different organizations such as the Knights of Labor Party, Farmer’s Alliance, Old Greenback Party and the Old Granger Party. It also has patches that say communist and socialist. I think that is interesting because the Republicans are grouping the Populists with Communists and Socialists. This can be used to exemplify the historical theme of people’s tendencies to affiliate groups with socialism and communism in a negative context, even when they are not socialists or communists. The Populist Party may have had socialist ideas, but they were not socialists. I would use this image by having students analyze it themselves and discuss the messages it is trying to make, who the audience is intended to be, and how the audience is supposed to receive this message.

Sound Money. The Cross of Gold. 1896. Accessed October 16, 2015.



This political cartoon was published on August 20th of 1896 in response to William Jennings Bryan’s “Cross of Gold Speech”. What can be seen here is an illustration of what Bryan spoke of that fateful day. You can see the laborer, christ-like, on a literal cross of gold. Not only that, you see the thorn of national banks being forced upon his head by Mark Hanna, who is standing on the shoulders of a Rothschild banker (depicted in a very offensive, antisemitic fashion). This image can be used to display the larger historical theme of individuals using rhetoric and imagery, often religiously fueled rhetoric and imagery, to persuade or move others. I would also bring this into my individual lesson plan in the instance that we discuss the actual speech used to inspire this cartoon. This will provide my students with the opportunity evaluate the speech and apply it to the image.



This image is of William McKinley campaigning on the front porch of his Ohio home. Unlike his opponent William Jennings Bryan, who traveled by railroad and spoke to crowds across the nation, William McKinley stayed at home during his campaign. This practice, known as the “front porch campaign”, was the norm at that time. This is one of the major contributors as to how McKinley won the presidency. Many saw Bryan’s campaign tactics as arrogant and off-putting. McKinley was seen as a more humble man by staying put and campaigning to those who only came to him. I enjoy this image because you do not see campaigning like this anymore and it can express the historical theme that practices and norms change over time. I would bring this into my lesson to show my class how McKinley’s campaign strategy was received and how it differed from Bryan.

Secondary Source:

Postel, Charles. *The Populist Vision*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

This monograph divided into 9 chapters that concentrate on certain aspects that formed and supported the Populist movement. From the beginning, Charles Postel takes a stance that is different from other historians by claiming the Populist movement was not an effort to overthrow the existing government, but was an effort to promote changes within the government on an economic and political level. The first chapter concentrates on the formation of the Farmers’ Alliance. Originating in Texas, the Farmers’ Alliance made up one of the largest groups within the populist movement. Chapter two then concentrates on the importance of education within the Populist movement. Due to the low cost freight rates, an influx of resources made their way to rural areas, giving the farmers knowledge of the latest in social thought. The Populists felt that if they expanded education to rural areas, they could have a better stance when it comes to commerce, technology, and social understanding. Chapter three goes on to concentrate on the debate in regards to the status of women within the Farmers’ alliance, along with what their role in modern society should’ve been. Postel states that rural reformers felt that political equality was essential for women’s progress because it gave them the ability to voice their needs and opinions. Chapter four concentrates on the Farmers’ Alliance response to the new commercial system. Farmers looked towards corporate models of how they could have build a trust that would have made it possible for them to have some control in the market. Chapter five concentrates on the role that Populists thought the government should have in modern society. Chapter six focuses on racial progress of the United States. Many Populists actually felt that segregation amongst races promoted progress and Postel states that they played a significant role in the formation of Jim Crow laws. This does not mean the Black people were not involved in

the movement, however. Chapter seven, focuses on the efforts of the Populists to gain support from urban areas. Moving on to chapter eight, Postel focuses on how Populists sought to adapt their religious thinking to the modern scientific age that was forming. Lastly, chapter nine concentrates on how the Populist's failure in presidential elections is what led to their failure. Postel ultimately concludes that Populists were thoroughly modern and sought an alternative vision of capitalism. They had faith in science, technology and communication, and sought reform rather than resistance. If I were to bring this into the classroom, I would probably have my students read only a few specific chapters, notably the ninth chapter as it would be a nice conclusion to the unit. However, I do not see myself using it in my individual lesson plan but appreciate the vast amount of background knowledge it gave me.

Websites:

Edwards, Rebecca, and Sarah DeFeo. "1896: The Presidential Campaign." Cartoons and Commentary. 2001. Accessed October 17, 2015. <http://projects.vassar.edu/1896/1896home.html>.

This website has an array of information regarding the presidential campaign of 1896. While the website was constructed by college students for Vassar College, I find the information it provides to be both credible and useful. This website is user-friendly as it is broken down into five categories: "The Cartoons", "The Parties and Platforms", "Leaders", "Campaign Themes", and "Special Features". The first of these consists of many political cartoons published at the time by both parties. They are listed chronologically amongst a timeline the notes important events of the campaign which it helpful while interpreting them. For example, the timeline mentions that Bryan accepts his nomination on August 12th and a list of political cartoons follow consisting of "The Cross of Gold" issued by *Harper's Weekly* a few days later. This cartoon pertains to the very speech which made that event possible. "Parties and Platforms" provides information regarding the Republican and Democratic Party along with their platforms. For example, for the Republican portion, the website provides the acceptance of William McKinley which laid out his platform. For the Democratic portion, it helps break down the party into the categories of Silver Democrats and Golden Democrats by providing their platform. "The Leaders" provides profiles on significant leaders of the campaign including both nominees. "Campaign Themes" provides a list of over 10 themes that shaped the campaign including immigration, women suffrage, and the currency issue to only name a few. This list is in the form of links that take you to an individual page for each of the themes and explains the issues on a deeper level. Lastly, "Special Features" gives teachers a list of ways to teach about the election of 1896. These range from discussion questions to writing and reading exercises. For example, it suggests that each student is given a character to play: for example, a Nebraska farmer, an Irish-American Catholic priest in Cleveland, a Jewish shopkeeper in Philadelphia, a middle-class woman reformer in Colorado. Then it asks them navigate through the website and determine who it is they would vote for. There are many ways to use this website within the classroom as it provides a variety of information. I personally would use this as way to arrange a student led investigation of the campaign or to find political cartoons for analysis.

"HarpWeek | Elections Homepage." HarpWeek | Elections Homepage. Accessed November 4, 2015. <http://elections.harpweek.com/default.asp>.

This is a website that provides with a variety of information regarding the presidential elections between 1860 and 1912. Each campaign is broken down into four sections: "Overview", "Cartoons", "Biographies" and "Events". I decided to focus on the 1896 election as it pertains to the time period in focus. First and foremost, "Overview" consists of information that is necessary when understanding this election. For example, they have a segment on the Populist Party which provides some background knowledge for understanding their platform. "Cartoons" consist of political cartoons published by *Harper Weekly*, *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, *Vanity Fair*, *Puck*, *Judge*, and the *Library of Congress Collection of Political Prints*. These cartoons are broken down into

different parties and themes which is helpful upon analyzation. The “Biographies” section provides profiles for presidential and vice Presidential candidates (with the exception of the Populist Party’s choice for vice president, Thomas E. Watson): William McKinley, Willian Jennings Bryan, Garret Agustus Hobart, and Arthur Sewall. The “Events” section provides a list of events that happened during the election along with a small description of said event. These included: The Depression of 1893, Supreme Court decisions, and the numerous conventions leading up to the election among others. All in all, this website, which is easy to navigate through, holds a lot of useful and helpful information. However, I would only use this website for the large variety of cartoons it provides like “The Giant Straddle” or “The Populist Trap”, both issued by *Harper Weekly*. Not only does it have a large variety, it also organizes the cartoons well.